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ENGLISH AGRICULTURE SINCE 1914. II

A survey of English agriculture made soon after the Armistice would have revealed a condition of affairs in many ways very different from that which obtained on the eve of the war. In 1918 the arable area in England alone was greater by some 1,102,000 acres than it had been in 1913—an increase of more than $10\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. In England and Wales together the increase amounted to about 1,340,000 acres, and in 1918 the area under wheat was greater by 51 per cent, and that under oats greater by $32\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, than the average of the ten years 1904-13. The total head of cattle was greater than before the war, but the numbers of sheep and pigs had declined. As regards the position of the various classes of the agricultural community mathematical indices of change are naturally hard to come by, but a general impression may perhaps be trusted to reveal the more important facts. The landlords at the time of the Armistice were already suffering from the failure of rents to advance in proportion to the general change in price levels, and sales of agricultural land were increasing. The Report of a committee appointed by the Agricultural Wages Board, which is dated March 5, 1919, speaks of "the large quantity of land which is coming into the market owing to the break up of estates" and mentions the fact that "occupiers have in many cases purchased their farms."¹ A reflection of this process may no doubt be seen in the increased acreage of land returned as occupied by owners. The official tables, which are concerned only with land under crops and grass and exclude mountain and heath land, show that, whereas in 1913 the total area occupied by owners in England and Wales was 2,890,559 acres, on June 4, 1919, it amounted to 3,296,452 acres—an increase of 14 per cent.²

To describe the position of the farmers is a less simple task. They had made money during the war, and those who were

¹ See Cmd. 76, p. 11.

² See Cd. 7325, p. 99; Cmd. 680, p. 41.

previously encumbered by debt were enabled to pay off their overdrafts and probably had capital to spare. The National Farmers' Union was rapidly increasing its membership and the farmers' leaders were taking an increasing interest in broad questions of agricultural policy. The fact that many farmers were buying their farms "at prices at which the interest on capital represents a higher rent than that which they were previously paying"¹ seemed to indicate confidence in the future prosperity of the industry. On the other hand, land sales made the position of the tenant farmer insecure; and it might be argued that it was insecurity of tenure which harassed tenants into buying their farms rather than that they were encouraged by confidence in the future. Again, though prices remained remunerative, the system of maximum prices prevented the full advantage of the world's cereal markets from being obtained, and doubt was felt as to the continuance of high prices, especially as the falling scale of guaranteed prices under the Corn Production Act tended to create an impression that expert opinion anticipated a slump.² The difficulty of obtaining labor during the latter months of the war, the vexatious intricacy of governmental regulations, the fact that rules and requirements necessarily varied almost from day to day, the upward movement of the minimum wage rates and the movement for shorter hours of work were all factors

¹ See Cmd. 76, p. 11.

² Lord Ernle says: "The price paid for wheat to home-producers was sometimes less by two-fifths than that paid for foreign bread-stuffs. Every quarter grown at home reduced the expenditure abroad, and the burden of the taxpayer was relieved, at the expense of the British farmer, by a sum which in the years 1917-20 exceeded £30,000,000." See *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, LXXXII (1921), 13-14. Lord Ernle speaks of the burden of the *taxpayer*, not of the consumer, because the price of bread was kept artificially low by a subsidy. As regards the psychological effect of the falling scale of guarantees the Majority Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture—a report which is dated December 10, 1919—says: "The existing feeling of uncertainty as to the cause of future prices of cereals seems also to some extent to have been fostered by the reduction in the prices guaranteed in Part I of the Corn Production Act from 60/- per imperial quarter for wheat in 1917 to 45/- in 1922, which appears to have given rise in some quarters to the supposition that official opinion was opposed to the view that prices of cereals would continue to range high for a considerable period." See Cmd. 473, p. 6, § 17. The guaranty for wheat, which had been 55/- in 1918 and 1919, was to fall to 45/- for the years 1920, 1921, and 1922.

which disquieted the farming community. At the same time one of the most obvious features of the agricultural situation after the Armistice was the need for considerable expenditure upon the land to make good the neglect of hedging and ditching and of general maintenance operations, which the desperate shortage of labor had made inevitable, as well as to clean land, which, largely for the same reason, had got into a very filthy condition. It would be very hard of course to strike a balance between the solid gains which the farmer had made and the difficulties which he experienced, or again between the hopes and uncertainties which he felt as regards the future; but it may perhaps be taken as a sign of caution that in the autumn of 1918 the area planted with wheat in England and Wales was less by 218,813 acres than that similarly treated in the autumn of the preceding year.

For the laborers the future seemed full of hope. In the Agricultural Wages Board they had obtained a powerful instrument for the amelioration of their lot, and already wages were higher and hours of work reduced. The actual advance in wage rates throughout the country had hardly as yet done more than keep pace with the increase in the cost of living; but the improvement had been greater than the average in the districts of especially low wages, and though part of the obvious increase in prosperity was probably due to the income derived by many laboring families from non-agricultural sources, such as military separation allowances or the employment of some members of the family in connection with aerodromes or munition works, the existence of the Wages Board was a safeguard for the future.¹ The weekly half-holiday soon became an accomplished fact and this was an inestimable boon—especially to the younger men, whose numbers increased with the rapid progress of demobilization. Moreover, the development of agricultural trade unionism gave the laborers a new sense of strength and inspired them with hope and confidence. Hope was in the air, born of a natural

¹ It was estimated that in the winter of 1918-19 agricultural wage rates were on an average 90 per cent higher than in 1914—89 per cent in the case of ordinary laborers and 100 per cent for stockmen—while the laborers' expenses were higher by 93 per cent than in 1914. See Cmd. 76, pp. 24, 37.

reaction when the cessation of hostilities removed the pressure of constant anxiety, and fostered by the exuberant oratory of the Prime Minister at the time of the General Election. England was to become "a land fit for heroes to live in."

For some time past, among those who concerned themselves with the larger questions of agricultural policy, there had been a feeling that the war-time development of tillage heralded a new day for English agriculture. Visions of a self-sufficient England, independent of foreign supplies of cereals, and of the English countryside repopled and prosperous, floated before the imagination of not a few. These visions had little basis in the hard facts of the economic situation; but the opinions to which they gave rise were contagious. Even the experts had been rather rash in their statements. Opinion had been a great deal influenced by Mr. T. H. Middleton's (now Sir Thomas Middleton's) pamphlet on *The Recent Development of German Agriculture* which was published in 1916 as a parliamentary paper; and Sir Daniel Hall, also in 1916, had written hopefully about the possibility of increasing the arable area by six million or even by ten million acres as a permanent policy.¹ Early in 1917 the hopes of a vast and permanent development of arable farming were given detailed and authoritative expression in the first part of the Selborne Committee's Report, and a year later the same committee in the second part of their Report reasserted their belief that it was desirable that the country "should become self-supporting in the matter of foodstuffs in the event of any future emergency."² Several factors combined to produce an atmosphere favorable to schemes for the expansion of English agriculture. The cruder fallacies of protectionism naturally thrived at a time when war-weariness promoted looseness of thought, and the movement of the rate of exchange with America after the Armistice seemed to the ignorant to be an additional argument in their favor. Again ignorance of agricultural facts on the part of urban idealists is always liable to make agrarian policy a cherished field for the exercise of philanthropic imagination

¹ See Cd. 8305; also A. D. Hall, *Agriculture after the War* (1916).

² See Cd. 8506 and Cd. 9079.

and there was a tendency to mistake the cessation of hostilities for the commencement of the millennium. Moreover, the German submarine campaign had provided a vivid lesson as to the precariousness of overseas supplies.¹ It was felt too that, after years of campaigning, many thousands of soldiers would find an open-air life on the land more congenial than urban employment. In regard to this last consideration it should be noted that in March, 1918, the Minister of Reconstruction had appointed a committee "to consider the steps and conditions, apart from the provision of Farm and Small Holding Colonies, necessary to attract to employment on the land all returning sailors and soldiers who may wish to take up country life, and particularly to induce them to do so in sufficient numbers to secure the maximum output from the land." This committee, in their Report which is dated December 20, 1918, recommended that in the case of untrained ex-service men the state should for a limited period contribute toward "the difference between the untrained man's economic value on the farm and the full local rate of wages," and, while urging that the state is "morally bound to consider the future security of an industry to which returning sailors and soldiers are invited to devote their lives," expressed the opinion "that the necessity of intensive production in the United Kingdom will increase and not diminish as years go by; and further that the demand for the additional labor required by such cultivation will continue to rise to an extent equal to any reduction due to labor-saving machinery."² Apart

¹ In view of the anxiety which was felt this may seem an understatement. But, as a matter of fact, while 12,652,000 tons of grain and grain products were imported into the United Kingdom by the Royal Commission on Wheat Supplies during the whole submarine campaign (from November, 1916, to October, 1918), only 4 per cent of the possible arrivals were lost through enemy action. See *First Report of the Royal Commission on Wheat Supplies*, 1921 (Cmd. 1544), pp. 37-38.

² See Report of the Committee of Section iv of the Advisory Council (1919), especially §§ 66 and 69. The present writer, who was a member of this committee, submitted a Minority Report, stating his inability to believe "that the number of agricultural laborers required to secure the maximum output which could profitably be obtained from the land of this country will exceed the number employed in agriculture before the War to the great extent that is presupposed by the recommendations of the foregoing Report," and expressing doubt "whether the taxpayer will be willing, for more than a few years, to provide a stimulus sufficiently strong to make any very great difference to the number of men for whom employment on the land will be available." See *ibid.*, p. 36.

from the more far-reaching hopes of agricultural development account must also be taken of the fact that the awakening of public interest in agriculture seemed at least to justify a belief that in the future farming ought not to be, and would not be, suffered to fall short of such opportunities as the world's markets might provide. Slackness of the kind which was only too common before the war would surely be intolerable in a nation which was devoted to the reconstruction of its economic prosperity. And experience gained in the war had shown how great was the need for improvement. In giving evidence before the Royal Commission of 1919, Sir Thomas Middleton said: "A great deal of the farming is of a very high order in this country. Before the war one was under the comfortable illusion that a very large proportion of it was of a high order; but I think that the experience one has had in the Food Production Department, and the experience of the Agricultural Committees throughout England and Wales, has pointed to the fact that after all there are more bad farmers than we supposed."¹

Throughout the first seven months of 1919 the prices obtainable by the British farmer for his cereals remained practically steady in the neighborhood of the controlled maximum figures, and only in June was the monthly index number of the prices of

¹ See Cmd. 345, question 3064. Mr. Floud (now Sir Francis Floud), in his evidence, said: "I think it has been a revelation to the Board and to members of executive committees to find how much second-rate farming there is in the country, and that an enormous increase in the production could be brought about if we could raise the level of farming generally in a district to that of the best farmer in that district." He also said: "I think it is true that landowners and their agents have not been sufficiently severe on bad tenants." See Cmd. 665, questions 16458, 16481. It may be pointed out in connection with the prevalent low standard of farming that the large schemes of development sketched in 1916 by Mr. A. D. Hall (now Sir Daniel Hall) in his book on *Agriculture after the War* can only fairly be judged in the light of the author's opinions as to the extensive improvements which were economically possible even before the outbreak of war. Sir Daniel considered that in the years before the war, with the price of wheat at about 35/- a quarter, arable farming "might with profit have been extended over at least as much land as had been under the plow in 1872," and said "if we further take into account the possibilities of diminishing costs by the greater use of machinery and improved organization, as on the suggested large scale farms, we might expect that the land could pay wages at rates comparable to those received by laborers in other industries, and yet provide a reasonable return for capital and management." See *Agriculture after the War*, p. 104.

agricultural produce lower than the annual index number for 1918.¹ There were however considerable changes in cropping—the decline in the area under grain crops in England and Wales being not far short of half-a-million acres, while the potato acreage was reduced by 25 per cent. The number of cows and heifers in milk increased, but there was a slight decline in the total head of cattle and an increase of 100,000 pigs was no appreciable offset to the reduction of the sheep population by more than 1,300,000. How far these changes were due to difficulties connected with the shortage of labor or to the fact that much of the land needed a rest from corn-growing,² and how far they were induced by fears for the future of prices or by the rising cost of labor it would be hard to say. In January, 1919, the workers' representatives on the Agricultural Wages Board proposed a substantial increase in the minimum wage rate and eventually in May various somewhat complicated changes were made of which the most important were (1) a reduction of the hours for which the minimum weekly wage was payable to 54 in summer and 48 in winter or to 52 hours throughout the year and (2) an increase of 6/6 a week in the minimum wage payable to male workers of twenty-one years and over. In the meantime—on March 3—the "Half-Holiday Order" came into operation.³ It must be remembered

¹ These index numbers are based on the prices of the principal articles sold off the farm weighted according to their relative importance. See *Agricultural Statistics*, LVI (1921), Part III, 88-89.

² Lord Ernle says: "Much of the tillage land of 1918 had grown corn crops for two or more years in succession without adequate labor to keep it clean or sufficient fertilizers to restore its fertility. It needed rest." See *op. cit.*, p. 43.

³ For all these changes see A. W. Ashby, "The Work of the Agricultural Wages Board in 1919," *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, LXXX (1919), 164-201. The terms of the Half-Holiday Order were as follows: "(1) For the purpose of the application of all differential rates for overtime fixed by any Order of the said Board, and notwithstanding any reference in any such Order to the hours of employment customary in any area in the case of any special class of workman, the definition of employment which is to be treated as overtime employment is hereby extended so as to include the following employment, that is to say: All employment in excess of 6½ hours on a Saturday or on such other day (not being Sunday) in every week as may be agreed between the employer and the worker. (2) Provided that any time spent by Horsemen, Cowmen, Shepherds, Teammen, and other classes of Stockmen in connection with the feeding and cleaning of stock shall be excluded from the foregoing extension of the definition

too that the first half of 1919 saw a considerable fall in the cost of living, though after June retail prices moved upward again. How far the cost of labor changed with the rise of wages and the reduction of hours cannot be determined. On the one hand demobilization was increasing the proportion of laborers who were physically fit and in the prime of life. On the other hand the passing away of the war strain produced a psychological reaction and many of the returned soldiers found it difficult to settle down to assiduous work. Farmers commonly complained of slackness among their employees and asserted that they were required to pay higher wages for a poorer quality of work; but in judging the validity of this complaint some allowance must be made for the natural tendency of an employer who is forced to pay increased wages to scrutinize the quality of his labor force more closely than was previously his custom.¹

In July, 1919, the question of the future agricultural policy of the country was brought to the fore by the appointment of a Royal Commission "to inquire into the economic prospects of the agricultural industry in Great Britain, with special reference to the adjustment of a balance between the prices of agricultural commodities, the costs of production, the remuneration of labor, and hours of employment." On August 5, the day on which the Commission began to hear evidence, "a letter from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries was

of overtime employment." The principle of this Order had been approved by the Wages Board some time before the Armistice and on September 3, 1918, notice was given of the Board's intention to propose a change of this nature "three months after the general cessation of hostilities, or on the withdrawal by the Food Controller of all restrictions upon food consumption (whichever event shall first occur)." See *Wages Board Gazette*, I, No. 3, 36, also No. 8, 93.

¹ In regard to this question of the efficiency of agricultural labor several witnesses before the Royal Commission of 1919 gave their impressions. See Cmd. 345, questions 1392-94, 1573-75, 1667-68, 1689-91, 1695-97 (evidence of the Hon. E. G. Strutt); questions 1889-1906, 2014-32, 2070-71 (evidence of Dr. E. J. Russell); questions 3039-41 (evidence of Sir Thomas Middleton); also questions 3869-76, 4473, 4492-4502, 4742-58, 4830-38; also Cmd. 365, questions 5375-76, 5988-89, 6041-45, 6153-61, 6369-71, 6545-77, 6555-56, etc. The difficulty of making an exact comparison between work done before the war and work done during the war was well brought out in Mr. Ashby's searching cross-examination of Dr. Russell.

read, intimating the desire of the Government that an Interim Report should be presented by the end of September in order that farmers might be informed of the conditions under which they could cultivate their land in the coming year"; but such haste proved incompatible with a thorough examination of the problem, especially as farm accounts for the cereal year 1918-19 would not be available until after Michaelmas and the harvest season made it impossible either for the farmer members of the Commission to spare more than two days a week for the hearing of evidence or for farmers generally to give much time to the preparation of estimates and accounts.¹ Before the Interim Report was presented (on December 10), the Commission had examined a large mass of material and this had been elucidated by a *viva voce* examination of witnesses extending to over 17,000 questions. It is hardly necessary to add that such bulky evidence cannot be summarized satisfactorily. In regard to the burning question of guaranteed prices, however, three points may be noticed.

The representatives of the Board of Agriculture, in giving evidence before the Commission, advocated a system of guaranteed prices for cereals and for cereals only, because cereal production was the branch of farming in which the pressure of foreign competition was most severe.² On the other hand, the Secretary of the Ministry of Food (Sir William Beveridge) told the Commission that "it was the policy of the Ministry of Food to maintain the milk supply by guaranteed prices, which of course involves control, even if other articles were not controlled," and pointed out that "milk is an essential which can only be produced

¹ See Cmd. 473, Majority Report, § 2; Minority Report, § 2. In the evidence-in-chief submitted on behalf of the National Farmers' Union by Mr. James Donaldson on September 23 it is stated that "to meet the pressing request from the Commission to submit the Union's evidence upon the costs of production at the earliest possible date, it has been physically impossible to submit all the data upon this question that the Union would have wished," and that after another month or six weeks "the Union would have been in a position to have submitted probably twice the number of statements that are contained in Mr. Wyllie's evidence." See Cmd. 391, 11289.

² See Cmd. 345, question 116 (evidence of Sir Daniel Hall, then Permanent Secretary of the Board of Agriculture); also Cmd. 665, questions 16255-57 (evidence of Mr. F. L. C. Floud—now Sir Francis Floud—then Assistant Secretary of the Board of Agriculture).

at home, and therefore it is more important to keep up the output of milk than of other agricultural produce.”¹ Thirdly, while individual farmers definitely advocated the continuance of guaranteed prices, the case presented by the National Farmers’ Union of England was that the question whether arable cultivation was to be maintained or extended was one of national policy for the government to decide, but that as business men farmers could adapt themselves to a régime of low prices and would face the abolition of all controls and guarantees with perfect equanimity. This is brought out by the replies given by Mr. Donaldson, on behalf of the Union, to questions asked by Mr. R. R. Robbins, one of the commissioners who subsequently became president of the Union. Mr. Robbins said: “And the purport of this document (i.e., the evidence-in-chief) on the one hand is to show that farmers, if the Government say they are to do so and so, are perfectly willing to conduct their businesses according to their own ideas as to what is best—without Government guarantees or interference?” Mr. Donaldson assented; and Mr. Robbins proceeded: “But on the other hand, the purport of it is that if the Government ask them to do something which they consider economically unsound from the farmers’ point of view, as distinct from the general point of view, the farmers are entitled to some guarantee which shall indemnify them against serious loss; and when the time arrives they are quite willing to say what in their opinion the guarantee should be?” Mr. Donaldson again replied “yes.”²

¹ See *ibid.*, questions 2385, 2422.

² See Cmd. 391, questions 11773-74. In the evidence-in-chief it was maintained that a return to the unrestricted play of the law of supply and demand “would not, taking the long view, do injury to the farmer nor to the workers as individuals,” that high wages might be paid, but that employment would be reduced and “the nation would lose heavily in output” (*ibid.*, question 11296). It was not however laid down as a certainty that guaranteed prices were necessary to maintain production, for the next paragraph contains the sentence: “It may be that by some drastic reforms in our agricultural system, such as by a great extension of the practice of co-operation amongst farmers, or by the development, on a large scale, of what is sometimes called ‘factory farming,’ or, at the other extreme, by a wide increase in the number of small holdings, or by each and all of these methods, agriculture can face the possibility of a decline in prices without the necessity for a reduction of output.” The verdict of the Union on this point was “We do not know” (*ibid.*, question 11297).

In the event, the Royal Commission found itself divided into two almost exactly equal bodies on the question whether the system of guaranteed prices should be continued. The Majority Report was signed by the chairman and eleven other commissioners, of whom one agreed only on the main question of principle and expressed dissent as regards all the detailed recommendations. The Minority Report was signed by eleven commissioners without qualification. The majority included, besides the chairman (Sir William Peat), all the farmer representatives save one, one of the labor representatives, and half the "independent" members. The minority included all the labor representatives save one, one farmer and half the "independents."¹

The Majority Report, after rehearsing the salient facts of recent agricultural history and the uncertainty, inimical to arable farming, which farmers had felt since the Armistice in regard to the future, recalled the fact that "the passing of the Corn Production Act by Parliament, and subsequent public pronouncements by the Prime Minister, indicate that the Government have definitely adopted the policy of increasing the acreage of land under tillage in this country." The Report further stated that "a considerable body of evidence given by farmers went to show that in the opinion of many of them no measure for assisting the farming industry by means of guaranteed prices of cereals is necessary solely in the interests of farmers themselves," and that in the opinion of these farmers "it is for Parliament to decide whether the national requirements necessitate increased corn production and consequently restriction on their freedom of action as regards their systems of cultivation." The conclusion of the Majority was that "if Parliament so decides, and farmers are required to undertake the greater risks and responsibilities arising from increased corn production, we think that a corresponding obligation rests upon the State to preserve them from the possibility of loss due to a substantial fall in cereal prices." In detail the Majority recommended:

¹ In order that my readers may be warned against any unconscious bias on my part, it is perhaps desirable to state here that I was myself one of the commissioners who signed the Minority Report.

1. That subject to the conditions set out in the following paragraphs, minimum prices for wheat, barley and oats grown in Great Britain be guaranteed by the State, on the same principle and conditions as are laid down in Part I of the Corn Production Act, 1917, the producer being allowed an unrestricted market for his produce, but the State retaining the right to control prices in case of national emergency.

2. That barley should be dealt with in the same manner as wheat under Section I of the Corn Production Act, payment of four times the difference between the average price as defined in the Act and the guaranteed minimum price per quarter being made in respect of that cereal.

3. That for the grain crops of 1920 and subsequent years the guarantees be calculated from year to year on a sliding scale based on the average bare costs of cereal production of the preceding year, rent being disregarded for this purpose; and that the datum line to which increases or decreases in the average costs of the 1920 grain crops above or below those of 1919 should be applied, shall be 68/-per quarter of 504 lbs. of wheat, 59/-per quarter of 448 lbs. of barley, and 46/-per quarter of 336 lbs. of oats.

4. That the guarantees be continued until Parliament otherwise decides, subject to not less than four years' notice of withdrawal being given.

5. That, if found necessary, the powers under Part IV of the corn Production Act be extended so as to enable the Boards of Agriculture or the County Committees to take effective action against any landowner or farmer who impedes or neglects to carry out the Orders issued by them for the better cultivation of the holding.

6. That any payment in respect of the guaranteed prices be dependent upon the production of a certificate from the Department concerned to the effect: (a) that the holding in respect of which payment under the guarantees is claimed has been well cultivated and an adequate amount of labour employed upon it or that such labour was not available; and (b) that either one-eighth part of the holding or one-fourth part of the arable land (whichever be the greater) is under cereal crop, or that so much less of the holding is under cereal crop as appears to be desirable in the public interest.

The Minority, in their Report, stated that "nothing in the conditions under which the industry was carried on before the War, or in the prospects now before it, would justify us in recommending the continuance of the policy of guaranteed prices for cereals." In regard to the common argument that the artificial stimulation of cereal production was necessary as an insurance against war risks, they pointed out that it would "require much more evidence on this point than has been brought to our notice to convince us that it is really necessary that the agricultural industry of Great Britain should in times of peace be maintained

upon a war footing," and that "we were not asked to lay down a war-policy for the industry." In regard to the argument that increased tillage was desirable as a means of rehabilitating the foreign exchanges, they urged that "exchange can be improved, with greater benefit to all concerned, by increasing exports rather than by decreasing imports." They further argued (1) that the basic figures recommended by the Majority, while on a higher scale than that suggested by "two such competent advocates of the policy of guaranteed prices as Sir Thomas Middleton and the Hon. E. G. Strutt," were much too low to insure the maintenance or extension of the cereal area by *voluntary* action; (2) that a system of government control of farming such as would be necessary to make the policy effective would be contrary to the best interest of the industry; (3) that guaranties sufficient to make farming remunerative "under the present conditions of tenure and with the present methods of cultivation" on the great mass of land which produces only $3\frac{1}{2}$ quarters an acre would probably "impose a heavy burden on the Treasury at a time when the need for national economy is paramount" and that, if effective, the policy would "prevent the application of genuine remedies by stereotyping the existing conditions and methods." In the opinion of the Minority, the recommendations of the Majority were likely to be unfair to the producer of meat and to the large number of small farmers who do not derive their income largely from cereal production. It would be "detrimental to the best interests of agriculture were it to be obliged to conduct its operations on the uncertain basis provided by guaranteed prices." Guaranties could only be given by Parliament "and no Parliament can bind its successors." Moreover, the Minority emphasized their opinion that a policy of guaranties would inevitably lead to a demand for the continuance of maximum prices." Action designed "to increase the farmer's sense of security in his holding, as desired by the witnesses speaking on behalf of the National Farmers' Union and the National Farmers' Union of Scotland, would do much more to give the farmers confidence, and thereby increase production, than any other measure." The Minority expressed their hope of being able to deal with

this problem of security of tenure and other matters important for the development of agriculture in a final report. For the present they recommended:

1. That farmers be informed that they shall be left free to cultivate their land in such manner as they deem best, in accordance with the rules of good husbandry.

2. That the Boards of Agriculture organize an efficient system of distribution of all available information relating to the progress and prospects of agriculture, with special reference to the course of world prices.

3. That, so long as prices of cereals are controlled by the Government the farmers be paid at prices not less than those at which the commodities controlled can be imported.¹

Such in outline was the division of opinion. But the Government had not waited for the advice of the Commission. Lord Ernle, who was president of the Board of Agriculture when the Commission was appointed, resigned; and on August 15 his place was taken by Lord Lee, the former Director of Food Production, whose adherence to the policy of the plow had been shown in the previous year by his resignation on the abandonment of the tillage program for 1918-19.² At a meeting held at Caxton Hall, with Lord Lee in the chair, the Prime Minister pledged the Government to the system of guaranteed prices. This was on October 21, 1919—seven weeks before the Interim Report was issued, but hardly early enough to influence the autumn sowings.³ It was primarily to this speech by Mr. Lloyd George

¹ For all this see the Interim Report, Cmd. 473.

² See Lord Lee's letter in the *Times* of July 23, 1918, and his speech in the House of Lords on July 24. In a letter to the chairman of the Agricultural Wages Board dated September 23, 1919, Lord Lee said: "I have come to the Board of Agriculture with the sole object of promoting production by every means in my power." See *Wages Board Gazette*, I, No. 28, 379.

³ Mr. Lloyd George stated at the meeting that it had been arranged for an earlier date but was postponed on account of the railway strike. In his speech he said: "I think it is essential that the guaranty should be given." He added that "the amount and the length of time are the subject of examination by a commission," but that the guaranty to be given "must have reference to the increased cost of production," and "must cover a sufficient period of years to make the farmer feel that it is worth his while to cultivate the land." "It is not," he said, "for me to indicate the period, because I should be usurping the functions of the Royal Commission"; but he went on to say: "It is not a matter of looking forward to next year or the second year." See the report of the meeting in the *Times* of

that the Majority of the Royal Commission referred in their Interim Report when they said that "the passing of the Corn Production Act by Parliament, and subsequent public pronouncements by the Prime Minister, indicate that the Government have definitely adopted the policy of increasing the acreage of land under tillage in this country."¹ It was in view of this speech too that the Minority in their Report ventured to say that "if the decision as to what is the best policy for agriculture had been left to the unfettered judgment of the Commission, we feel sure that several of our colleagues, who deemed themselves bound by certain declarations of Government policy, would have voted with us in opposition to the policy of enforced cultivation of cereals with the consequent guarantee of prices."²

Soon after the issue of the Interim Report, the chairman and six other commissioners, all of whom had signed the Majority Report, resigned, and the Commission was informed that the Government had adopted the unusual course of advising the Crown to bring its proceedings to a close.³ The Commission therefore never presented a Final Report, but the sixteen remaining commissioners, who included all the representatives of labor, a majority of the farmers' representatives and (apart from the chairman) half the "independents," unanimously resolved to put on record their view that "all the subjects which had been proposed by their Evidence Sub-Committee for investigation and accepted by them, were well within the terms of reference" and to express the opinion "that many of the remaining subjects now excluded are of more enduring importance to the future of agriculture than the policy of guarantees, as to which they had not been agreed."

October 22, 1919. The Railway Strike had lasted from September 26 to October 6. Lord Lee, speaking at Gloucester on November 10, said "that the Government policy is fixed, and that failing a report from the Commission on this point—I do not think we have any reason to anticipate anything of the kind—the Government must and will act on its own responsibility." See *Journal of the Ministry of Agriculture*, XXVI, 794.

¹ See Cmd. 473, p. 6, § 18.

² See *ibid.*, p. 12, § 19.

³ Lord Lee's letter announcing this decision is dated February 24, 1920. In it he contends that the subjects the Commission proposed to examine were "not included in the terms of Reference."

It was added that "with regard to these matters they had reason to hope that they might find a large measure of agreement," and the Commission "reorded their regret that much valuable evidence already taken together with other evidence prepared at their request by various bodies, could not now have any influence on the questions which they were justified in believing were submitted to them."¹

The subsequent history of the Government's agricultural policy can best be considered after something has been said of the actual progress of agricultural affairs during the period covered by the sessions of the Royal Commission. Three matters deserve special notice—prices, wages, and the sale of land. For the 1919 harvest the Government had guaranteed minimum prices—75/6 per 504 lbs. for wheat, 68/10½ per 448 lbs. for barley, and 47/6 per 336 lbs. for oats. For imperial quarters the approximate equivalents of these prices are 71/11 for wheat, 61/1 for barley, and 44/1 for oats. The system of maximum prices nominally came to an end; but in the case of wheat the Government used its control of the mills to insure that for wheat of ordinary quality no more than the guaranteed minimum price should be paid, so that in effect the minimum price became the maximum.² The natural tendency of cereal prices at this period must therefore be sought in the course of prices paid for barley and oats, and in both cases there was a notable advance after the middle of the summer. The weekly average price of oats per imperial quarter, which had only once touched 50/-before August (in the week ending January 18) and had

¹ A full report of the meeting of the Commission at which these resolutions were passed was published at the time in the *Daily Telegraph*. The sixteen commissioners who agreed to these resolutions included all the representatives of Scottish and Welsh agriculture and the two English farmers who afterward held office as president of the National Farmers' Union in 1920 and 1921, respectively. See *Wages Board Gazette*, II, 134-37.

² The exact position was that "there was no maximum price for wheat harvested in 1919, but millers were informed by the Food Controller that the prices to be paid by them should not exceed an average of 76/6 per quarter of 504 lbs. (72/10 per 480 lbs.) for wheat purchased on rail at producer's station, or 77/- per quarter of 504 lbs. (73/4 per 480 lbs.) for wheat delivered into mill." See *Journal of the Ministry of Agriculture*, XXVII, 395.

been under 49/- in 19 out of the 30 weeks preceding August, was 50/3 in the week ending August 2 and 62/4 in the week ending September 13. From August 9 to the end of the year it was never less than 55/3. The advance in barley prices was still greater. From January to August the weekly average price per imperial quarter had ranged between 61/10 and 63/4, but it jumped to 73/8 in the week ending August 9 and continued to rise week by week until September 27 when it reached 95/2. Between that date and November 8 it varied from 93/10 to 97/10 and on November 15 was 100/7. Between November 22 and the end of the year it was never lower than 103/6 and on December 6 touched its maximum for the year at 108/11. Nor was this tremendous advance in cereal prices very short-lived. For oats the monthly average ranged from 55/7 to 64/8 in the first eight months of 1920: the corresponding range for barely was from 81/6 (August, 1920) to 108/5 (January, 1920). It is clear, too, that if the farmer had had a free market for his wheat the removal of control would have been followed in the case of that cereal also by a very great increase in price.¹ And the rise was not confined to cereals. The index numbers of the prices of agricultural produce sold off the farm were above the average of the year 1918 in every month from July, 1919, to April, 1921. Table I shows the *annual* index numbers, and Table II shows those for the individual months.²

As regards the remuneration of agricultural labor, the main point to be noticed is that an Order of the Wages Board reduced the hours in excess of which overtime rates had to be paid to fifty hours a week in October, 1919, and forty-eight for the winter

¹ The average (c.i.f.) price of imported wheat per 480 lbs. was 91/6 in 1917, 100/10 in 1918, 92/1 in 1919, and 95/- for the period January-May, 1920. See *ibid.*, p. 395.

² See *Agricultural Statistics*, LVI (1921), Part III, 88-89, also the *Year Book of the National Farmers' Union for 1922*, pp. 304-5. The weights used in calculating these index numbers are stated to be as follows: Cattle 25, milk 21, sheep 13, pigs 13, hay 11, wheat 8, barley 6, potatoes 6, poultry and eggs 4, fruit 4, wool 3, butter 3, oats 2, cheese 1, beans and peas 1, vegetables 1. Care should be taken to distinguish these index numbers from the earlier ones issued by the Board of Agriculture which had the average of the years 1906-8 as their base, while these are based on the average of the years 1911-13.

months. From the beginning of March fifty hours were again to be worked for the minimum wage. This change was equivalent to a rise in wages: it meant that the minimum rate per hour was increased. There was some controversy over the change, which ill-informed persons misinterpreted as involving a limitation of hours; and even the new president of the Board of Agriculture urged the Wages Board to reconsider its decision on the

TABLE I

1911-13 100	1916 160	1919 258
1914 101	1917 201	1920 292
1915 127	1918 232	1921 221

TABLE II

Month	1919	1920	1921	1922*
January	248	313	286	177
February	250	305	272	183
March	250	299	258	182
April	253	299	241	168
May	232	269	212	170
June	228	264	202
July	242	274	200
August	238	277	216
September	248	282	200
October	266	291	190
November	282	297	184
December	307	294	182

* Since May, 1922, the index numbers published in the *Journal of the Ministry of Agriculture* have been based, not on the average prices of the years 1911-13, but on the average prices of the same months of the years 1911-13 taken as 100. On this basis the monthly figures for 1922 are: January, 175; February, 170; March, 177; April, 170; May, 171; June, 168; July, 172; August, 167.

ground that a reduction in the hours of work would be inimical to production. In reply to Lord Lee's letter the chairman of the Agricultural Wages Board pointed out that the new Order was the result of an agreement between the representatives of the employers and the representatives of the laborers and "that both employers and workers hold the view that the question is really one of wages and not of hours, as there is nothing in the Orders of the Board to prevent any farmer from agreeing with his men to work regularly from fifty to fifty-four or any number of hours per week, provided the wages paid are not less than the minimum rates fixed." The effect of the new Order was simply

to require overtime rates to be paid when work was done in excess of fifty hours in summer or forty-eight in winter.¹ Apart from minor changes affecting particular districts or special classes of work people, no further alteration in the minimum wage took place until April, 1920, when the general minimum for adult males was raised to 42/-, with a minimum increase of 4/-. This advance "was made in opposition to the workers, who demanded 50/-, the employers eventually agreeing with the appointed members to fix 42/-."² The cost of living, it should be remembered, had been gradually rising since the early part of the summer of 1919 (when the official index number showed an excess of 105 per cent over July, 1914) and at the beginning of May, 1920, was reckoned to be 141 per cent higher than before the war.³

Meanwhile, the sale of agricultural estates had been proceeding apace. It was constantly referred to in the evidence taken by the Royal Commission as being on a revolutionary scale and it was the fact that tenant farmers were so often faced with the alternative of buying or quitting their farms which at this time gave so much urgency to their demand for security of tenure. The number of holdings returned as owned or mainly owned by the occupier in England and Wales increased from 48,665 in 1919

¹ See Lord Lee's letter and the reply of Sir Ailwyn Fellowes (now Lord Ailwyn) in the *Wages Board Gazette*, I, No. 28, 379-80. Mr. R. R. Robbins, the vice-chairman of the employers' section of the Wages Board, in a letter to the *Times* dated October 10, said: "I desire to emphasize the point that payment at a higher rate for hours worked in excess of a given number, be it 50 or 54, involves no statutory limitation of the hours of working in the industry such as labor is seeking to impose by amendment to the Hours of Employment Bill, No. 2." See *Wages Board Gazette*, I, No. 29, 413. At this time and for some months to come the agricultural community was much agitated over the question of the exclusion of agriculture from the Bill referred to by Mr. Robbins—the so-called "Forty-Eight Hours Bill."

² See Sir Henry Rew's article on "The Wages Problem in Agriculture," *Quarterly Review* (January, 1921), p. 186.

³ See the *Labor Gazette of the Ministry of Labor*, XXVIII (January, 1920), 5, and XXIX (January, 1921), 6. The items on which these figures are based are, for the purposes of the calculation, "combined in accordance with their relative importance in pre-war working class family expenditure," but it should be noticed that they make no allowance for changes in the objects of such expenditure during the war nor for the special conditions of rural districts.

to 57,234 in 1920, while the area owned by occupiers increased from 3,296,452 acres to 4,102,556 acres—an increase of more than 24 per cent in twelve months. The causes of this movement are not hard to discover. Agricultural land had long been under-rented and by a curious tradition among English agricultural landlords it was regarded as rather ungentlemanly to raise the rent on a sitting tenant. Because of the general rise of prices, the increased profitableness of farming, and the favorable opportunities for the investment of capital presented as a consequence of the rise in the rate of interest, landlords could greatly increase their incomes by selling their estates and investing the proceeds. And many of them were driven to do this by the pressure of war taxation and by the great increase in the cost of repairs, which was all the more serious because, owing to shortage of labor and materials during the war, several years' arrears of repairs were waiting to be carried out. But the purchase of farms by the tenants was, for the time being at any rate, a bad thing for farming, and the uncertainty attaching to the future of agricultural prices made it a dangerous expedient for the farmers. It meant that the farmer's capital, which should have been employed in clearing land after war conditions had caused it to get foul, and in working off arrears of hedging and draining, was often used for the purchase of the farm. And since land fetched very high prices, it meant that, instead of paying an augmented rent from year to year as the profits of farming allowed, the farmer did what was equivalent to promising an increased rent for the rest of time—either in interest on borrowed capital or in foregoing the income which he might have obtained from an alternative investment.¹ Some measure

¹ The student of English agrarian history will notice that the history of the Tudor period provides a curious parallel. When the influx of American silver, following the debasement of the coinage, raised prices, landlords found that the fixed rents of the copyholders prevented them to a great extent from using the most obvious method of increasing their nominal incomes to meet the change in prices. But in many cases the fines payable on the passing of a copyhold to a new tenant were arbitrary in amount. The lord could not increase the annual rent: he could, and did, demand a greatly increased capital sum at the change of tenancy. The system of fixed rents, like the tradition against raising rents on a sitting tenant at the present time, impelled landlords to more radical changes than would other-

of protection was however afforded to tenant-farmers at the landlord's expense by the passing, in 1919, of the Agricultural Land Sales (Restriction of Notices to Quit) Act.¹ This enacted that "in the making after the passing of the Act of any contract for sale of a holding or part of a holding any then current and unexpired notice to determine the tenancy of the holding . . . shall be null and void, unless the tenant after the passing of the Act and prior to the contract of sale agrees in writing that the notice shall be valid."² In other words, the tenant would have a longer period of grace: the new landlord, if he wished to occupy the land himself or for other reasons to get rid of the sitting tenant, would have to give him a fresh notice of the length required by his agreement.

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[*To be continued*]

wise have been necessary. I do not suggest that this explains all the inclosures and evictions even of the latter part of the sixteenth century: but it was undoubtedly one factor in the movement. See R. Lennard, "Custom and Change in Sixteenth-Century England," *English Historical Review*, XXVIII (October, 1913), 745-58. In considering the difficulties of English landlords since 1914 it must not be forgotten that some were able to sell timber at war prices.

¹ See 9 and 10 Geo. V, c. 63.

² See Aubrey J. Spencer, "Contemporary Agricultural Law," *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, LXXX, 154.